

## CLAIMS

1. An information system accessible over a computer data network,  
5 comprising:
  - a user e-mail client able to send and receive e-mail messages;
  - an e-mail server able to send and receive e-mail messages;
  - a computer data network intermediate to the user e-mail client and the e-mail server;
  - 10 a receiver for accepting e-mail messages over the computer data network;
  - a topic and a qualifier disposed in said e-mail messages that represent a reference information query;
  - a database for storing said topic and qualifier together with a  
15 return address of the user e-mail client;
  - a scheduler for invoking previously scheduled, stored requests;
  - a plurality of topic servers for researching information that can be used in said response, and that are selected according to said topic and filtered by said qualifier;
  - 20 a composer for constructing a responsive e-mail message with information provided by one of the plurality of topic servers and that is sent to said return address.
2. The system of claim 1, further comprising:  
25 an ad server connected to the composer and able to inject advertisements for which a fee has been paid.
3. The system of claim 1, wherein:  
30 each one of the plurality of topic servers is specialized and researches a single topic area.
4. The system of claim 1, further comprising:

a webserver connected to the plurality of topic servers and the database, and having a HTTP connection to the Internet;

wherein, said topics and qualifiers can be delivered over the internet from a client browser, and said responses are composed as HTTP documents.

5. The system of claim 1, further comprising:

a webserver connected to the plurality of topic servers and the database, and having a HTTP connection to the Internet;

wherein, said topics and qualifiers can be delivered over the internet from a wireless client using WAP, and said responses are composed as HTTP documents that are delivered back to a respective wireless device.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein:

the composer selectively responses with either a plain text answer or an HTTP document that includes clickable hypertext that links to further information on said topic that can be browsed by a user.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein:

said qualifier is remembered for each said user and is used as a default qualifier when a current query lacks a qualifier.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein:

said qualifier represents a physical location of said user and responses to said topic are filtered according such physical location.

9. An electronic query method for a network client, comprising:

entering a topic in the form of "topic@recipient.com" into a send-to address line of an e-mail question message;

entering a qualifier on a subject line of said e-mail question message that constrains said topic or entering a qualifier preceded by "Subject:" in the message body of said email question that constrains said topic;;

sending said e-mail question message via a mail server on the Internet to a recipient corresponding to one referenced in said "topic@recipient.com"; and

receiving an e-mail answer message with a message body  
5 from said recipient that includes an answer to a database query which assumed a question about said topic was asked and said qualifier is to be used as a constraint.

10. An answering agent, comprising:

10 a plurality of incoming e-mail queries each with a "To:" field, a subject field, and a message body field;

a SMTP-server providing for receipt of said plurality of incoming e-mail queries;

15 a plurality of POP-mailboxes each corresponding to a topic that can be referred to in said "To:" field of a particular one of the plurality of incoming e-mail queries;

an answering-agent receiver that strips a topic and a qualifier from said plurality of incoming e-mail queries;

20 an answering-agent database for storing topics, qualifiers, and return addresses provided by the receiver;

an answering-agent scheduler for selecting a query in the database for response;

25 an answering-agent composer providing for an answer to said selected query to be generated within a message body field of a response;

a plurality of topic servers each responsive to a different query topic;

a plurality of outgoing e-mail answers that each include said answer in said message body field that corresponds to a respective one of the plurality of incoming e-mail queries; and

30 an action/transaction method providing a mechanism whereby email messages containing answers from one answering-agent can be replied-to or forwarded to another answering-agent to obtain additional information or to invoke other processes.

11. The answering agent of claim 10, further comprising:  
an advertisement server connected to insert an advertisement  
in each of said outgoing e-mail answers.

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12. The answering agent of claim 10, further comprising:  
an advertisement server connected to not insert an  
advertisement in a particular one of said outgoing e-mail answers if it is  
addressed to a user who has paid a subscription fee.